DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 195 EA 019 806

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TITLE Increasing Behavior Management Effectiveness through Problem Analysis and Individualization.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (Denver, CO, November 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Style; *Discipline; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individual Differences; *Individual Instruction; Learning Theories; Nontraditional Education; Participative Decision Making; *Problem Solving; *Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

To reduce disciplinary cases without using suspension or alienating teachers and parents is a challenging task for principals. Forcing teachers to tolerate unruly student behavior is no solution. When both teachers and principals experience failure in eliciting desirable student attitudes and behavior, some relief measures are appropriate. This paper shows how schools can approach behavior management through creative problem analysis and individualized educational programs. One logical starting place is the faculty meeting, where consensus can be obtained before choosing a course of action or investigative format. During the problem analysis, certain behavioral phenomena will arise, including a preparation phase, an incubation period, and finally, inspiration. One possible outcome is to design an individual instruction program, which usually embodies wholesome, humane, and noncompetitive elements. Such programs accept student learning differences and reduce the trauma experienced by classrooms of recalcitrant pupils acclimatized to rigid, operationally ineffectual learning environments. Although organizationally imposing, individualized learning is a viable concept based on diagnostically determined needs of children in a given community and "universal" objectives. Consideration is given to peer relationships, learning styles, self-concept, and subject interests. An appendix contains formats for problem-solving, guidelines for identifying problems, and a countdown for problem-solving. Included are nine references. (MLH)

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INCREASING BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND INDIVIDUALIZATION

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EA 019 806

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of States on Inservice Education, Denver, Colorado, November 22-26. 1986.

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INCREASING BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND INDIVIDUALIZATION

A Persistent Problem

For many present and former school principals, this writer among them, trying to reduce the usually overwhelming load of disciplinary cases trafficking through their office is like trying to impede the Niagara Falls during the rainy season. The innumerable stories told by teachers about their recalcitrant students would easily provide principals with more "in-basket/ out-basket" leadership exercises then they might ever need.

At the same time, somewhat acclimated to the deluge of such problems, principals, percolating with Solomon-like judgments, largely ignore the root causes of disruptive student behavior in the classroom. This is why student classroom misbehavior never ceases, and why school principals are so preoccupied. Further, such inattention may be due to devastatingly persistent teacher pressure coupled with a principal's dispirited will that little is done to stem the flow of disciplinary cases.

Expedient Solution

Finally charged with the responsibility to investigate and to control student behavior, it is easily imagined that the school principal becomes ensnarled in debate with teachers and, likely, parents over how to proceed.

One aspect of the principal's dilemma is that teachers often seek suspension or dismissal or abandonment to some classroom Siberia as just punishment for a student's misdemeanors. On the other hand, parents shout invectives against teacher brutality at Board of Education meetings, where reported suspensions are formally acted upon by school board members.

A former colleague of this writer has said, "When teachers put the pressure on me to take action against student classroom misbehavior, my suspension rate goes up. Then unfortunately, Board members start criticizing my leadership. It's a terrible dilemma to face." Hundreds of other school principals could be similarly quoted, I'm certain. Most school principals don't squat like frogs on a rock and croak about their fate, but enough do, and allow student classroom misbehavior to become a scrofulous blight on their professional lives. Even when months are spent in meetings focusing attention on the rising incidence of reported cases of student disruption in the classroom, solutions tend to be expedient. Too often, school principals come from these meetings battered and dulled by the cry, sometimes their own, for immediate action, which inevitable takes the form of a memorandum to all teachers that they stop sending students to the office, or that they must proceed with forms and reports through layers of authority. Obviously, none of these methods and strategies seem to relieve the trauma.

Premises for Change

Someone must precipitate change, not necessarily for lofty principle, but for survival, at least. The signal flag for change is raised whenever educators experience enervating anxiety. Snygg and Combs (1949, Chapters 2 and 7) in their book Individual Behavior: A New Frame of Reference for Psychology declare that behavior is circumscribed by phenomena that arise at particular moments. If so, it is a rigorous endorsement for "striking while the iron is hot." All may not agree, but there is no question that relief is sought when frustration and fear are experienced. It is at this time that a strategy for change should be initiated.

Furthermore, Clark L. Hull (1943), a proponent of the S-R reinforcement school of learning theory, holds that responses followed by rewards are high motivational stregtheners. Hilgard and Marquis in Kimble's (1961, Chap. 9) revised edition of Conditioning and Learning lends credence to this thesis.

Granted, no one law of reinforcement exists, but empirical data does suggest its validity, to a degree.

Kurt Lewin (1935) in his A Dynamic Theory of Personality states that man's "needs" fulfillment and the tensions he's burdened with are inseparable. That is a premise that few would argue with, and contained therein lies a mandate for both teacher and principal: there is a common cause in which all educators may be joined. What is awesome to behold is the gross difficulty in communicating this "truth" to one another, for often is heard: "All he ever does is send the student back to me unpunished" or "Thank G-d I wouldn't see her around here in another few weeks!"

One must recognize that when teachers and principals experience failure in eliciting desirable attitudes and behavior among students, the introduction of relief measures is appropriate.

Change Through Problem Analysis

Where and how one begins the strategy cannot fully be answered. Each school has an appropriate vehicle for a beginning. The faculty meeting, if it usually focuses on curricular or other teacher-oriented problems, is the ideal starting place. If faculty meetings are concerned only with administrative matters, then one must look elsewhere for a starting point--at a private meeting with one teacher who is complaining about student misbehavior. Remember, the teacher's "need" must be frustrated before one may institute a strategy for change. Whether discussing student misbehavior with one teacher or several, the principal's purpose is to ask if he or they recognize the existence of a problem.

Deviation

They may have to be reminded that when more students than we care to have are being sent to the principal's office, suspended, dismissed, or assigned to detention classes for misbehavior, a recognizable deviation from the norm exists. There are other signs of deviation, of course, but the impact of student traffic is a significant criterion, since effective teaching and school leadership is reduced with an unwarranted intrusion of disciplinary problems. Typically, such deviation occurs when a new principal or several new teachers are assigned to a school, or when a community's population changes. A diminishing efficiency should alert everyone to the need for action.

Analysis

With consensus, an analysis of the problem may be started. In order to sharply focus everyone's attention on the problem, an investigative format should be introduced. Several are available, Conway, Jennings, and Milstein's (1974), among others (See Appendix A). By following a design, attention is riveted on the issue, not on any particular person or office. Although responsibility may later be placed, judgment isn't made precipitately. Remember, before arriving at conclusions, list all the known facts, supported by data, related to the problem; the possible reasons for the problem existing; and all research pertinent to the problem. Do not hesitate to include every imaginable reason. Recognize not only that the problem exists but where it occurs, how often, and when. Be alert, too, to what isn't happening in a typical school. Expert opinion is vital here.

While conducting the problem analysis, certain behavioral phenomena will arise. Graham Wallas (1926) singled out three phases. First, there is a preparation for analysis in which data are clarified and defined. Second, a period of incubation develops during which unconscious mental activity takes place while doing other things. Third, and last, inspiration occurs. The period of time taken to conclude these three phases may be overlong.

Therefore, impetus must be given to the problem-solvers. One "helping" activity is "brain storming". William Gordon (1961) coined the term "synectics" to epitomize the act.

After completing the problem analysis format, bringing intellectual, philosophical, and experimental judgment to bear, a conclusion will be reached. The principal's ability to encourage logical, rational thinking and reveal faulty logic in a gracious, supportive manner will determine the staff's readiness to accept recommendations and make proposals.

A Considered Solution

The premise of an individualized educational program embodies principles that contain elements that are wholesome, humane, and non-competitive. Such principles are reflected, in part, in the writings of Nussel, Inglis, and Wiersma (1976, pp., 2-4), who state

> ....accept the basic premise that children of the same age have different cognitive and affective characteristics and cannot be expected to learn the same body of content in the same length of time and in the same way.
>
> ....Children will not be expected to adjust to uniform educational programs, but will receive instruction based on diagnosed need. Children of the same age will not be expected to attain the same degree of mastery nor cover the same content in graded tests during a given academic year. Children will be tested for the purpose of improving their instruction rather than for categorizing and grading. Children will be encouraged to develop their interest, self-direction, and creativity. Children's unique personal characteristics and attitudes will be considered in the classroom. Finally, children will be provided with choices in the materials they use.

Such a program will reduce the trauma teachers experience in classrooms of recalcitrant pupils who are products of and committed to rigid tradition-bound, operationally ineffectual learning environments.

It is readily conceivable that teachers' psychological needs, among others, will be fulfilled further with a comprehensive support system involving adaptions of team teaching, differentiated staffing, shared-decision making among teachers and administrators, nongrading of students, diagnostic teaching, grouping practices based on diagnosis, and the use of varied multilevel and multimedia materials. (Nussel et al, 1974, p. 4)

Individualized learning is a viable concept, however organizationally imposing it may appear, in that its precepts dwell upon learning objectives that are based upon diagnostically determined needs of children in a given community as well as broadly stated or "universal" objectives. Furthermore, consideration is given to peer relationships, learning style, self-concept, achievement and interest in a subject when deciding upon appropriate objectives for a youngster. A portion of the data supporting this thesis is contained in the writings of Hilgard and Ryans, who suggest that a dependence on extrinsic motivators, such as material rewards, is likely to instill competitiveness among students and affect only a small proportion of any group. Reducing extrinsic motivators and installing intrinsic motivators should have an emeliorating effect on classroom behavior.

Once accepted, along with other recommendations, the often seemingly radical changes required may be traumatic for those concerned. Best results can be achieved by starting with small increments of individualization during the transitional period. Success begets success as exemplified in experiements in exploratory motivation as outlined in K.C. Montgomery's (1954, pp. 60-64) report in the Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology titled "The Role of the Exploratory Drive in Learning."

Following is an example of a problem specification form for the delineation of various aspects of a problem: a school bond election defeat. The notations represent the generalized judgment of a group of concerned educators.

The format would serve equally as well in the discussion of the cause or causes for an increase in pupil and student misbehavior.

Having identified elements of the recognized problem, the next step should entail methods of research for the gathering of data supportive to the solution of the problem. The methodology would include primary and secondary document searches, as well as survey researches among teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. The author's "information gathering" form is in Figure 1b.

Appendix A

FORMATS FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

Figure 1a*

Form 2: Problem specification: the Milbrook bond rejection

What is Known	Probable Lead	Possible Lead
What is the deviation?		
-Defeat of the bond Issue (3,925 opposed, 2,184 in favor). First time ever that a bond issue was defeated.		X
When did it occur?		
-February 19, 1973		X
-Following campaign stressing need to remodel plant to meet curriculum requirements (A.S.)	X	
Where?		
-Heavy negative vote indicates a general community-wide discrepancy.	X	
With whom?		
-High suspicion that community median age is increasing and thus there would be many citizens without children in school (S.)	X	
Hunches		
-Fear that new school could be used to integrate the district, bussing in black children from the neighboring city.		X
-Innovative school design (open classrooms)		X
-Keeping old buildings as a school might have diluted campaign impact (P.)		X

S = superintendent
AS = assistant superintendent
P = parent

*Source: Conway, Jennings, and Milstein in Understanding Communities, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974, p. 44.

Figure 1b*

Form 3: From problem specification to information gathering (as filled out by Superintendent Goodal).

Leads to Deviations	Information Needed to Determine Accuracy of Lead	Methods of Collecting Information
Probable leads		
1. Campaign stressing needs for open school design	Attitudes of citizens towards new school plant concept	Survey representative sample of citizens concerning acceptability of school plant innovations.
2. Wide-spread negative vote (suspected)	Area breakdown of voting patterns	Analysis of vote returns by precint (mapping).
3. Citizens without children voting against the issue (suspected)	Demographic analysis of voting patterns	Survey the votes, cross tabulate demographic information with responses.
Possible leads		
1. First defeat of a bond issue in the district (also wide margin of defeat)	a) past voting records b) current district votes on other tax issues (e.g., municipal bonds, stat bonds)	a) Document search (Revised poll records over last decade) b) Comparison of school and other tax referendum votes (form of trend analysis)
2. Innovative school design	Attitudes of citizens toward school design curriculum innovation etc.	Survey representative sample of the community.
3. Keeping old buildings in spite of arguing over its inadequacy	Attitudes of citizens toward this campaign strategy	Survey representative sample of the community.
4. Fear of racial integration	Attitudes of citizens	Surveys

*Source: Conway, Jennings, and Milstein in Understanding Communities, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974, p. 45.

Figure 2*

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

1. The four guidelines for writing a problem statement that allows us to answer a problem with a positive approach are:

_____ What is the problem situation?

_____ Who is affected?

_____ Exactly what is wrong?

_____ How did it become a problem?

_____ How did you discover it?

_____ Who is causing it?

_____ What kind of problem is it?

_____ Who should solve it?

_____ How can it be solved?

_____ How many goals are there?

_____ What is the goal for improvement?

_____ How will you measure change?

2. Write out a problem statement and develop a chart with reasons FOR and AGAINST the problem being lessened or solved.

Example: Problem Statement: I have a problem dealing with Joe about keeping to the time schedule the agency had agreed to keep.

Reasons:	FOR it Remaining a Problem	AGAINST it Remaining a Problem

Reduction Ideas:

*Source: Anonymous

Figure 3*

COUNTDOWN FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

Following are some considerations that can help you to be specific as you respond to the four guideline questions while writing a problem statement:

1. Who is affected? Consider these possibilities before deciding what you want to say about this. Is it you? Is it one other person? Is it a small group of people? Is it an entire organization? Is it the community or society at large?
2. Who is causing it? We frequently speak of problems as though they were caused by circumstances that didn't relate directly to people. This is almost never the case. There is almost always some person or persons who could influence things being different. Consider the same possibilities as above. Is it you? Is it one other person? Is it a small group of people? Is it an entire organization? Is it the community or society at large?
3. What kind of a problem is it? There are many ways to classify kinds of problems. The following considerations may prove helpful:

   There is unclarity or disagreement about <u>goals</u>.

   There is unclarity or disagreement about the <u>means</u> of achieving goals.

   There is a lack of the <u>skills</u> needed to carry out a particular means.

   There is a lack of <u>material resources</u>.

There is inaccurate communication.

There is too little or too much communication.

People have different understanding of the same thing.

There is insufficient time or schedules don't coincide.

Roles are lacking or inappropriate.

Norms are restrictive, unclear, or misinterpreted.

There are conflicts of ideology.

There is unclarity or conflict about decision making, e.g. power struggles.

Expression of feelings is inappropriate or inadequate.

There is conflict related to individual differences.

4. What is the goal for improvement? Ideally, this should be stated so clearly that anyone reading your statement would know how to determine when the goal had been reached. It would tell exactly who would be doing what, where, how, and to what extent. Until you know where you are going, it's very difficult to make and carry out plans to get there. The more clear you are about your intended target at any given time, the more likely you will recognize that it is an incorrect target, should this prove to be the case.

*Source: Anonymous

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